United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1197
4 August 1992

TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ With Sarajevo under heavy mortar fire, Secretary-General announces suspension of United Nations operations for 72 hours, pending efforts to re-establish cease-fire; UNPROFOR's outgoing Chief of Staff for Sarajevo says he hopes shelling around Sarajevo airport is not a deliberate escalation of the conflict.

+ Ukranian officer serving with UNPROFOR in Sarajevo died on 1 August of wounds sustained in mortar attack on 31 July; one other injured critically, three others lightly wounded.

+ New team of United Nations weapons inspectors being sent to Iraq on 8 August.

+ United Nations Spokeswoman Nadia Younes informed correspondents today that Sarajevo had been under a very heavy mortar fire much of the day and on three occasions the airport had been closed.

* * *

In a statement issued this afternoon, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced that he had accepted the recommendation of the Force Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), made in consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that United Nations operations at Sarajevo airport be suspended for a period of 72 hours, effective from 6 p.m. local time. .

The Secretary-General condemned today's shelling of Sarajevo airport, saying that the attacks, "which appear to have been deliberate, have jeopardized the safety of both United Nations personnel and aircraft as well as the security of humanitarian supplies".

The statement says that during the period that the airlift is suspended, the Deputy Force Commander of UNPROFOR, Major General Philippe Morillon, will travel to Sarajevo to assess the situation and to seek from all parties a reaffirmation of their commitment to the June 6 agreement which made it possible to reopen the airport. "In particular", it continues, "he will

(more)

For information media—not an official record

endeavour to re-establish the cease-fire, which has been increasinly violated in recent days, and obtain serious commitments from the parties to adhere strictly to it in future. After 72 hours and in light of General Morillon's report, a decision will be taken with regard to the future of the operation."

In the meantime, every effort would be made to continue to deliver relief supplies by land to the strife-affected regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In a press conference at headquarters today, UNPROFOR's outgoing Chief of Staff for Sarajevo, General Lewis McKenzie, said that he hoped the mortar fire around Sarajevo airport today was an anomally and not a deliberate escalation of the conflict. He explained that the airport was in an area where both sides were seeking territorial gains. "I don't think it threatens the airlift", he said.

The priority now was to establish a road corridor, with 20 kilometres secured on either side, to bring relief supplies to the villages and towns elsewhere in the country that were suffering significantly more hardship than Sarajevo. The situation in the city, he said, had been relatively better in recent weeks, with generally reduced shelling.

Describing UNPROFOR as "obsessed with impartiality", General McKenzie said, "They asked for a peace-keeping force and they got a peace-keeping force." Responding to the repeated query as to why the Force did not attack those firing on the city, he said that would destroy its impartiality and leave its personnel too vulnerable, as "the most important hostages" around.

Asked about reports of Serbian concentration camps, he said that there had been protests from both sides about detention centres, and he would give no judgment on the issue. Stressing again UNPROFOR's mandate, he said it had no responsibility for anything outside of Sarajevo.

* * *

In a separate development, the Spokeswoman announced that a Ukranian officer serving with UNPROFOR in Sarajevo, Cergei Topikha, died on 1 August as a result of wounds sustained the day before. He and another Ukranian soldier were seriously injured and another three were wounded but not badly, when their position was hit by mortar fire on Friday, 31 July.

Officer Topikha and the other seriously wounded soldier, Yuri Karpenko, were taken to hospital in Ulm, Germany, where he died. Yuri Karpenko was still in hospital, in a critical condition. The other three were treated in Sarajevo.

* * *

A new team of 26 United Nations weapons inspectors, headed by Nikita Smidovic, is being sent to Iraq this Saturday, in connection with that country's weapons of mass destruction and the Chairman of the Special Commission on Iraqi Disarmament has said that he has informed the Deputy Prime

Minister that "there would be very swift reaction if there was any attempt to block us this time".

Making the announcement at a press conference at Headquarters today, Ambassador Ekéus, said the 26-member team, which is currently being assembled in Bahrain, will visit "very important sites and locations where we have reason to suspect that prohibited material of significance is stored or hidden". He also pointed out that Iraq is still refusing to give information on their foreign supplier network and the Special Commission would continue the search for such information at this time.

Explaining the team's composition, he said there would be a "very high component" of members from the coalition, saying that the Special Commission was "highly dependent" on the major weapons countries - the United States, United Kingdom of France, which had extensive expertise in this area. He said the new team first had to meet certain strict criteria such as knowledge, experience, resilience and courage, and that nationality was not a priority requirement for selection. Despite Iraq's objections to including coalition members on the team, he said, he was convinced that its authorities would "like to see a new chapter between Iraq and the Special Commission" and would cooperate.

Referring to the latest barring of UNSCOM inspectors for 17 days from entering the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in Baghdad, Ambassador Ekéus said, "Iraq has learned a very severe lesson that it was a very close call this last time," he said. "My deepest worry was that Iraq didn't realize how how dangerous the situation really was and therefore I have some modest belief that now it will not be repeated".

* *** *